

State of the County  
Bay Area Chamber of Commerce  
Wednesday, February 18, 2015

Tom Hickner  
Bay County Executive

Good afternoon

I want to take a moment to first commend recently retired Chamber President Mike Seward, Chamber staff, your chamber board and each of you for your efforts in helping make our community a great place to live and work.

Thank you.

County government is a complex organization that will spend over \$153 million in 2015 and employ 550 individuals in full and part time positions.

Overall, residents are receiving value for their county tax dollars in over 40 important service areas, including Sheriff road patrol, 911, recreation, enhancement of our environment

health programs for young children and families, services to our senior population, and our criminal justice system.

Since 1993, our administration has worked to ensure that we have properly maintained county buildings and equipment that have been financed on a pay as you go basis.

Every county budget has been balanced with no increase in property tax rates.

Our general fund reserves have increased from \$2 million in 1993 to \$12.4 million in 2014.

Our pension system continues to be over funded. Our credit rating has been upgraded.

The Board of Commissioners and my administration will ensure continued balanced budgets.

There are several key efforts which were accomplished in 2014 and objectives that should be addressed in 2015 and beyond.

### **911:**

Working with Midland and Tuscola counties, we have purchased a new software system that will significantly improve communication between our 911 staff, local and state public safety agencies, and Bay County residents. The system will be operational in 2015.

### **Health Department:**

We now have a partnership with Saginaw Valley State University's College of Health and Human Services for a University clinic at our health department which will provide greater access to health services while providing learning opportunities for SVSU students.

We are proud that Bay County is in the top tier of MI counties that have accomplished high vaccination rates.

### **Recreation:**

We will continue to invest in Pinconning Park, our Civic Arena, the Bay County golf course and our community center to maintain and improve recreational opportunities for Bay County residents.

### **Environmental Affairs & Community Development:**

Yesterday the Board of Commissioners formerly endorsed the Bay City State Recreational Area Lakefront Beach Access Study.

The Study is a consensus between DNR leadership and local residents for future investments at the Park.

This plan will lead to greater public access to our Saginaw Bay waterfront, including a boardwalk, additional beach restoration and grooming, and ultimately construction of a scenic outlook or Pier at the end of State Park Drive.

### **Services to our Seniors:**

In 2011 we were awarded a \$385,000 Elder Program Grant from the Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women.

This effort involved local law enforcement and community human service organizations and is intended to support our older residents as they deal with ongoing challenges and threats.

## **Human Resources:**

Last year we established a health and wellness clinic to enhance the health of our employees. We expect to produce savings in our health insurance costs.

Our clinic has improved the lives of many employees and made the difference in at least 3 cases involving an unknown life and death situation.

We will continue to view our employees as essential to quality public services .

## **Animal Control:**

Animal control matters produce the greatest number of incoming calls to my office.

We will continue to provide effective public safety services while we work with the Humane Society to promote adoptions.

### **Intergovernmental Cooperation:**

Local governments in Bay County have demonstrated we can cooperate.

Our new water treatment plant is perhaps the most significant accomplishment of local government in the last 35 years. This project is being completed as a direct result of the efforts of the Road Commission, the water & sewer department, the city of Bay City, our townships and Bay County.

Working with City Manager Rick Finn and city and county staff, we have established a city-county technology work group that will focus on how we can share hardware, software and resources.



A top priority is an enhanced geographic information system.

With leadership by Frankenlust Township Supervisor Ron Campbell, we are meeting at least quarterly to maintain good communication and cooperation between townships, cities and county officials.

### **Community & Economic Development:**

We must maintain ongoing support of Bay Future and the Great Lakes Bay Regional Alliance.

We all should be involved in implementing the Roadmap to the Future, a strategic planning effort that was led by the Chamber and Community Foundation.

Essential to our success is a balanced economic development strategy that recognizes all of the key sectors of our local and regional economy,

including agriculture, speciality manufacturing, tourism, recreation and retail trade.

We also must recognize that neighborhood redevelopment continued investment in every downtown and along our major township road systems is essential to a successful economic growth effort.

### **Communication with residents:**

We will continue to improve our transparency with the public by ongoing investment in technology, our web site and facebook page and Bay 3 TV.

Our monthly e letter provides ongoing information on activities of county departments and staff.

Please let us know if you would like to receive our newsletter.

Finally, the importance of excellent local schools, colleges and universities, and ongoing improvements to our quality of life must be recognized.

Many studies have demonstrated that superior local schools and a community's quality of life, directly influence business location and expansion decisions.

As a community, we must value education and continue to invest in civic projects.

I am optimistic about our future and look forward to working with all of you as we address the opportunities facing our community.

Thank you.